



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Visitor Services Project



Serving the Visitor 2002



A Report on Visitors to the National Park System

NPS Visitor Services Project





Serving the Visitor

2002



A Report on Visitors to the National Park System
National Park Service Visitor Services Project



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Foreword

A message from the Director



The National Park System is seen as many things. Many see it as a symbol of the American spirit. As such, it showcases both the accomplishments of individuals and the potential of our nation. America's parks offer places of unity, hope, and healing—their beauty inspires and their history enlightens.

With the increasing number of visitors to National Park Service units, the great central task of preserving the land for future generations has become even more important. As employees of the National Park Service, part of our calling is to serve these visitors while protecting the resource they come to enjoy. Sustainable partnerships with volunteers, corporations, foundations, state and local agencies are a critical component in achieving the great central task of meeting visitor expectations and protecting the resource. These partnerships will continue to play an increasing role in the operation of the National Park System. The importance of working together and sharing information to solve challenges cannot be underestimated.

Park managers need all of the usable knowledge they can obtain to make better decisions, operate the parks, protect resources, manage visitors and plan for the future. One tool for obtaining information about visitors is the Visitor Services Project (VSP). Since 1988, the VSP has provided a consistent source of visitor information. Visitor opinions about the quality of facilities and services offered in the parks provide an important measure of how well the public is being served. Not only should this usable knowledge about the parks be shared with partners, but also with the public we are committed to serving.

Serving the Visitor 2002, is the ninth annual report that measures the quality of the facilities and services that the National Park Service provides to the visiting public. While there is always room for improvement, visitor quality ratings are consistently high. National Park Service employees, volunteers, and partners are to be commended for their outstanding commitment to serving the public. I urge you to carefully review the information in *Serving the Visitor 2002* and share it with your staff and partners.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Fran P. Mainella". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fran P. Mainella
Director

Introduction

Visitor feedback plays a critical role in improving how the National Park Service (NPS) serves the public and manages its resources. Serving the visitor is one of the dual missions charged to the NPS in the Organic Act of 1916. The Visitor Services Project (VSP) in-depth visitor studies and Visitor Survey Card (VSC) both provide important data on how well the visitor is being served, as well as visitor understanding of park resource issues. This ninth annual report—“Serving the Visitor 2002”—compiles some visitor opinions about their park visits derived from these two types of visitor studies.

During 2002, the NPS Visitor Services Project, based at the University of Idaho moved under a new Director, Dr. Steven J. Hollenhorst. The VSP and VSC now operate under the University of Idaho Park Studies Unit (UI PSU).

Since 1988, the VSP has conducted over 140 in-depth visitor studies in over 100 units of the National Park System. Through these customized studies, park managers obtain accurate information about visitors—who they are, what they do, their needs and opinions. Managers have used this information in a variety of ways to learn from and about visitors. Ultimately, the parks are managed more efficiently as a result of this usable knowledge.

“All phases of the project were well managed and done in such a way that only a minimal burden was placed on the park’s staff. We have found that the study provides information to the park that is useful in our day-to-day operations, as well as in planning for the future.”

Superintendent
George Washington Memorial Parkway

A customer satisfaction card has also been used for the past five years to survey visitors to over 300 units of the National Park System. The card will continue to be used annually by NPS units to measure performance related to visitor satisfaction, and visitor understanding. The survey results allow park managers to report performance in accordance with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). In addition, the results can be applied to management needs, such as improving the design of park facilities, identifying general strengths and weaknesses in visitor services, and employee training. Results are compiled into park, cluster, regional, and national reports.

The first section of this report describes visitors’ evaluations of 12 important services, taken from the in-depth visitor studies in selected parks. The quality ratings by visitors in *Serving the Visitor 2002* are



Shenandoah National Park, VSP visitor study, 2001

indicators of customer service—only a few of the services provided by the NPS, and only a sample of visitors are included. In this section, each graph compares 2 years of current data (2001-2002), shown in black, with 5-year baseline data (1996-2000), shown in green. Graphs that show results for less than 5 parks are labeled with "CAUTION!" since data gathered from such a small number of parks should be interpreted and used cautiously.

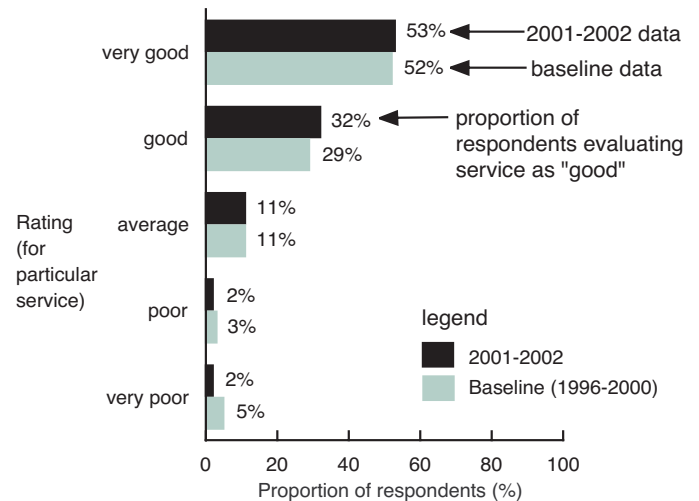
The second section includes visitors' evaluations of important services from the customer satisfaction card surveys conducted in most NPS units. Included are 3 important service categories—park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities—as well as the overall rating used in reporting GPRA performance. In this section, each graph compares current data (2002) shown in black, with a 4-year baseline of data (1998-2001), shown in green.

An appendix at the end of this report describes the research methods and limitations of both types of

A visitor's comment:

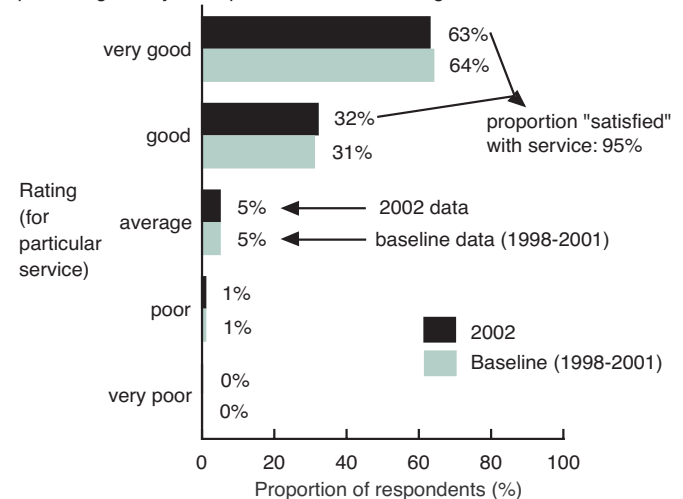
My sister and I both enjoy travelling. We like some man made things but really seek out the natural beauty of this great & wonderful country of ours. Hope all will preserve & protect

2001-2002: Number of parks represented; number of respondents represented; percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.



Sample graph for in-depth visitor studies

2002: Number of responses represented; number of indicators represented; percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.



Sample graph for customer satisfaction card surveys

VSP Visitor Studies

General Services

Park personnel

Park employees, such as rangers at entrance stations, maintenance employees, emergency response teams, and law enforcement officers are an important part of many visitors' park experience. Visitors at 12 parks were asked to rate the quality of park personnel at those parks. 66% rated the quality of park personnel as "very good," compared to the baseline rating of 63%. 23% of visitors rated park personnel as "good" and 8% rated them as "average." 3% rated park personnel as "poor" or "very poor," less than the baseline rating of 4%.

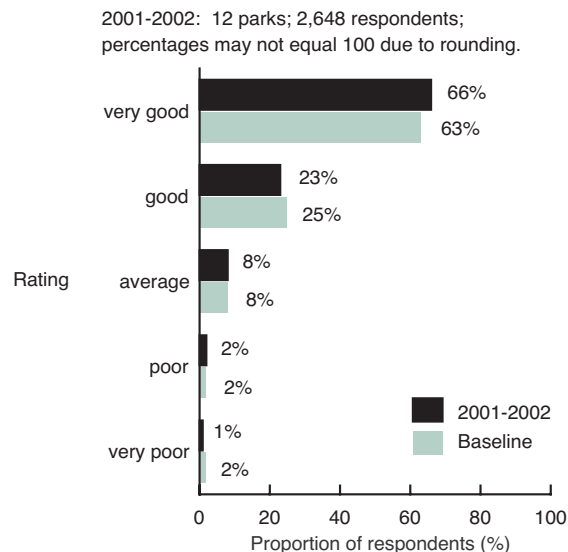


Figure 1: Quality of park personnel

Visitor centers

Visitor centers offer information, publications for sale, and other services to help visitors make the most of their park visit. Visitors rated the general quality of visitor centers in 11 parks. 51% rated visitor centers as "very good," compared to the baseline rating of 52%. 30% rated visitor centers as "good" and 14% rated them as "average." 5% rated visitor centers as "poor" or "very poor," compared to the baseline rating of 4%.

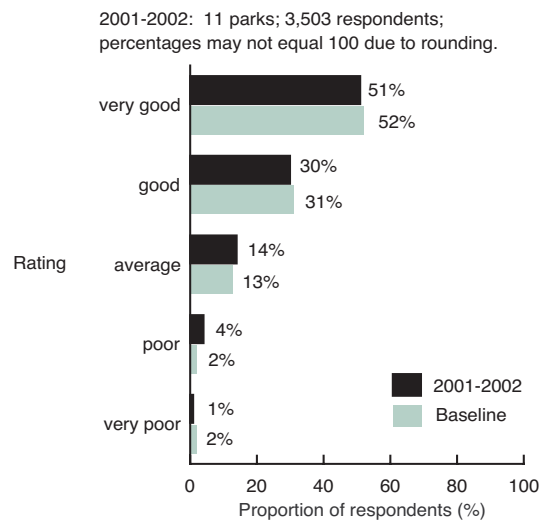


Figure 2: Quality of visitor centers

Directional signs

Directional signs are important in helping visitors find their way around parks and to locate services, facilities, and points of interest. Visitors at 7 parks evaluated the quality of directional signs in and around those parks. 48% rated the directional signs as “very good,” equal to the baseline rating of 48%. 31% of visitors felt the directional signs were “good” and 15% rated them as “average.” 6% rated the directional signs as “poor” or “very poor,” less than the baseline rating of 7%.

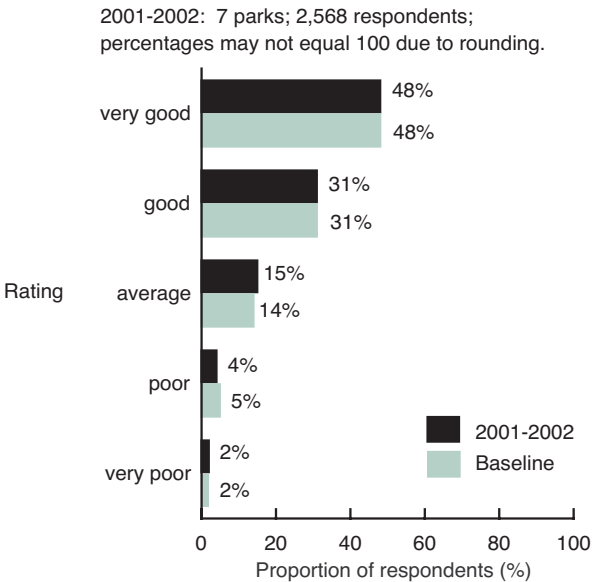


Figure 3: Quality of directional signs



Eisenhower National Historic Site, 2000

A visitor's comment:

Nice facility overall and very friendly volunteer staff. Wish I had seen a ranger or two doing raving interp. Thanks it was fun.

NPS Facilities

Restrooms

Restrooms are a necessity for park visitors. Visitors at 13 parks were asked to rate the quality of the restrooms in those parks. 45% rated restroom quality as “very good,” compared to the baseline rating of 39%. 33% of visitors felt the restrooms were “good” and 17% rated them as “average.” 6% rated the restrooms as “poor” or “very poor,” compared to the baseline rating of 9%.

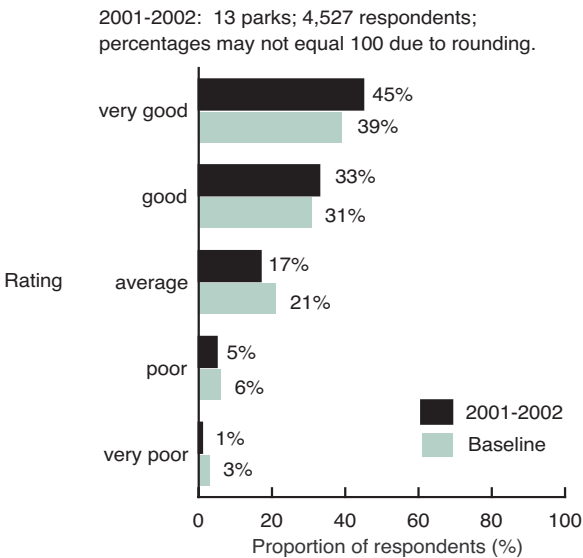


Figure 4: Quality of restrooms

Campgrounds

Camping is a central part of some visitors’ park experience. Visitors at 6 parks were asked to rate the quality of NPS campgrounds in those parks. 46% rated the campgrounds as “very good,” equal to the baseline rating of 46%. 34% responded that the campgrounds were “good” and 16% felt they were “average.” 4% rated the campgrounds as “poor” or “very poor,” compared to the baseline rating of 8%.

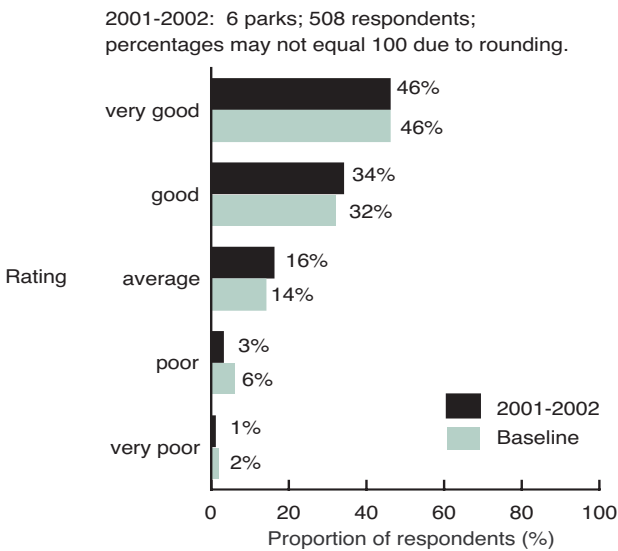


Figure 5: Quality of campgrounds

Picnic areas

Picnicking is a traditional park activity that many visitors enjoy. Visitors at 9 parks were asked to rate the quality of picnic areas in those parks. 42% rated the picnic areas as “very good,” compared to the baseline rating of 43%. 34% felt the picnic areas were “good” and 19% rated them as “average.” 5% felt the picnic areas were “poor” or “very poor,” less than the baseline rating of 6%.

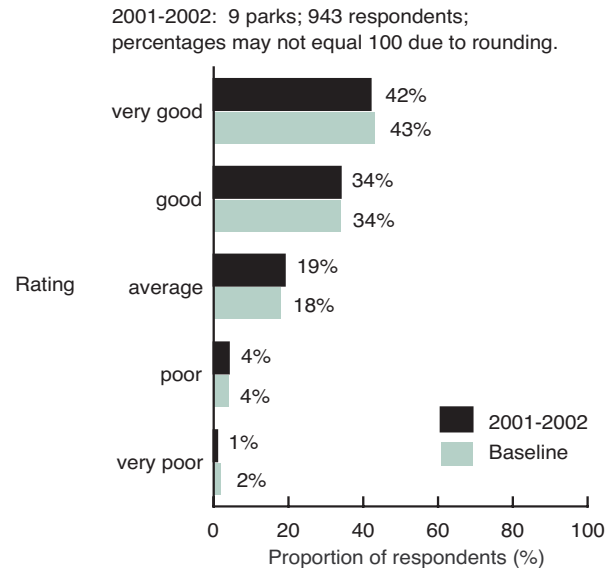


Figure 6: Quality of picnic areas

A visitor's comment:

The buildings and grounds have become shabby, dirty and not well maintained. The "push button" table did not work in most places.



Cape Hatteras National Seashore, 2002

Interpretive Services

Ranger programs

Ranger programs include guided walks and tours, campfire programs, and living history demonstrations. In 13 parks, visitors were asked to rate ranger programs. 63% of visitors rated the ranger programs as “very good,” equal to the baseline rating of 63%. 24% responded that the ranger programs were “good” and 9% felt they were “average.” 4% rated the ranger programs as “poor” or “very poor,” equal to the baseline rating of 4%.

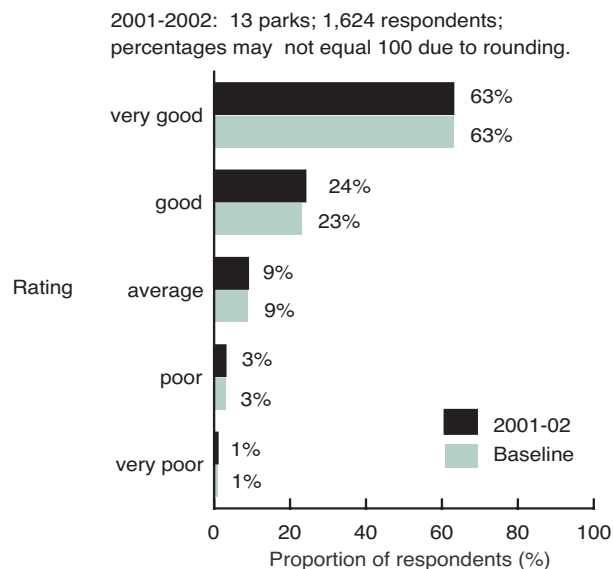


Figure 7: Quality of ranger programs

Exhibits

Exhibits, which are found inside museums and visitor centers and along roads and trails, are a valuable interpretive service offered in parks. Visitors at 12 parks evaluated the quality of exhibits in those parks. 41% rated the exhibits as “very good,” compared to the baseline rating of 45%. Exhibits were rated as “good” by 36% of visitors and 18% felt the exhibits were “average.” 5% rated the exhibits as “poor” or “very poor,” compared to the baseline rating of 4%.

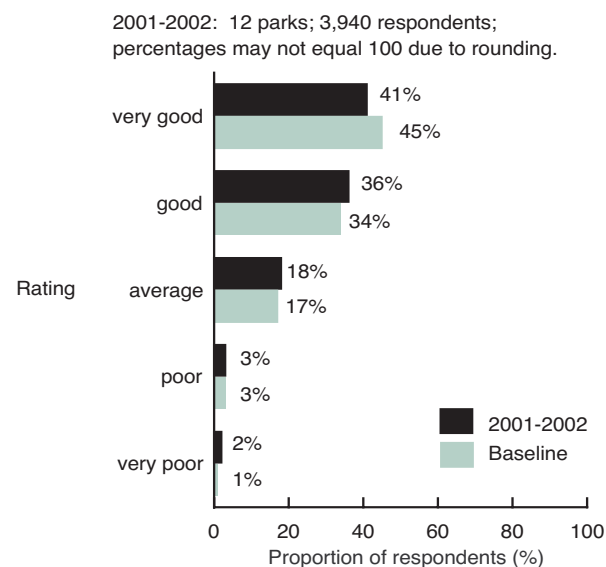


Figure 8: Quality of exhibits

Park brochures

Most parks have a brochure containing a map and basic information to help visitors plan their visit. The brochure is usually distributed to visitors as they enter the park or arrive at a visitor center. Visitors at 13 parks were asked to rate the quality of these brochures. 53% rated the brochure as “very good,” compared to the baseline rating of 50%. 33% rated the park brochures as “good” and 11% rated them as “average.” 3% felt the park brochures were “poor” or “very poor,” equal to the baseline rating of 3%.



Valley Forge National Historical Park, 2001

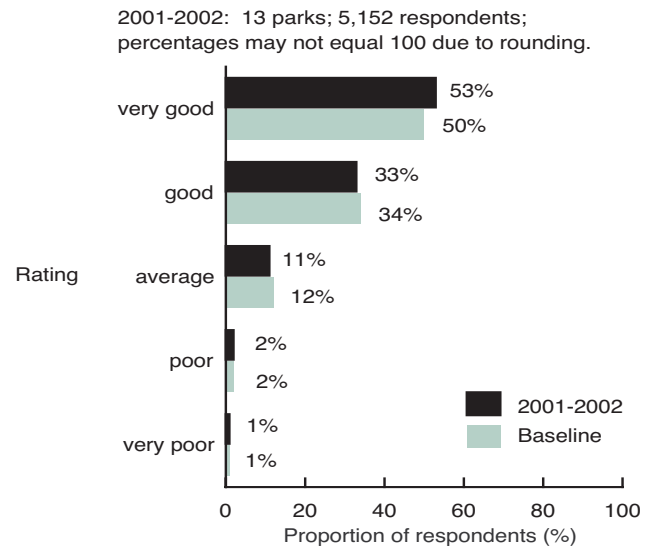


Figure 9: Quality of park brochures

A visitor's comment:

the ranger programs were
very insightful as well as
professional. We enjoyed having
a selection of various programs
as well as various times.

Concession Services

Lodging

Many parks have hotels or motels within their boundaries and these facilities are an important part of some visitors' park experience. Visitors at 3 parks were asked to rate the quality of overnight accommodations in those parks. 37% of visitors rated the quality of park lodging as "very good," compared to the baseline rating of 41%. 40% of visitors felt the lodging was "good" and 16% rated it as "average." 6% rated the lodging as "poor" or "very poor," equal to the baseline rating of 6%. *Because few parks are included in the 2001-2002 data, caution should be taken in interpreting these results.*

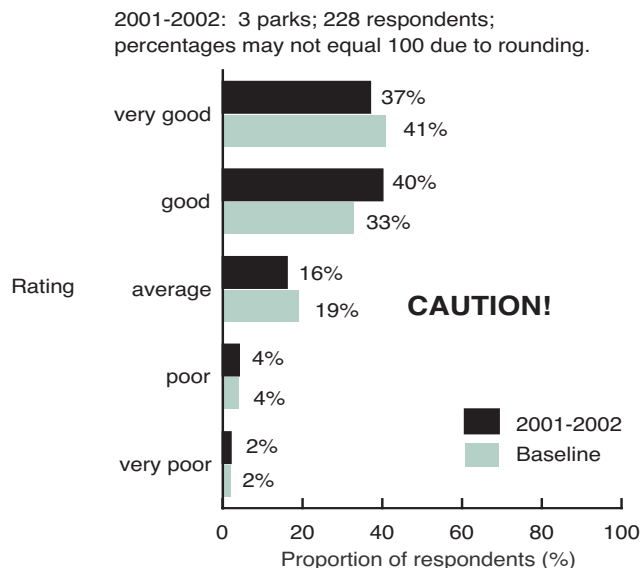


Figure 10: Quality of lodging

Food services

The restaurants, cafeterias, snack bars, and other food services offered in parks can be important to visitors. Visitors at 4 parks with food services were asked to rate the quality of those services. 28% of visitors rated the quality of food services as "very good," compared to the baseline rating of 32%. 33% rated the food services as "good" and 27% felt these services were "average." 12% rated the food services as "poor" or "very poor," compared to the baseline rating of 10%. *Because few parks are included in the 2001-2002 data, caution should be taken in interpreting these results.*

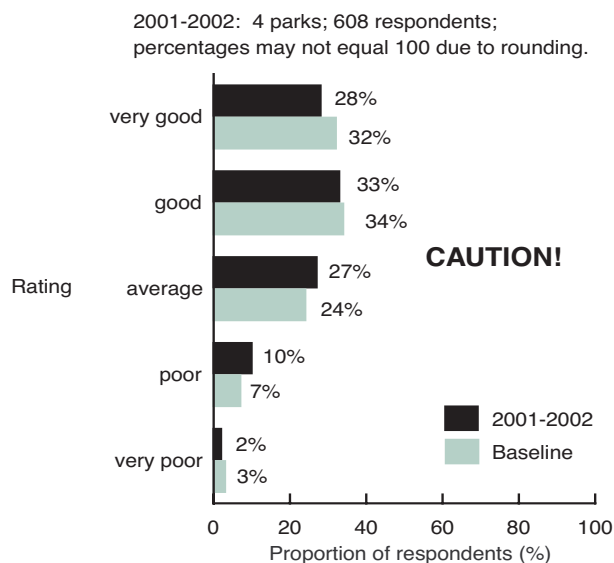


Figure 11: Quality of food services

Gift shops

Gift shops in parks provide visitors with an opportunity to bring home mementos of their park visit. Visitors at 12 parks rated the quality of gift shops in those parks. 38% responded that gift shops were “very good,” compared to the baseline rating of 35%. 37% rated the gift shops as “good” and 21% felt they were “average.” 5% rated the gift shops as “poor” or “very poor,” compared to the baseline rating of 7%.

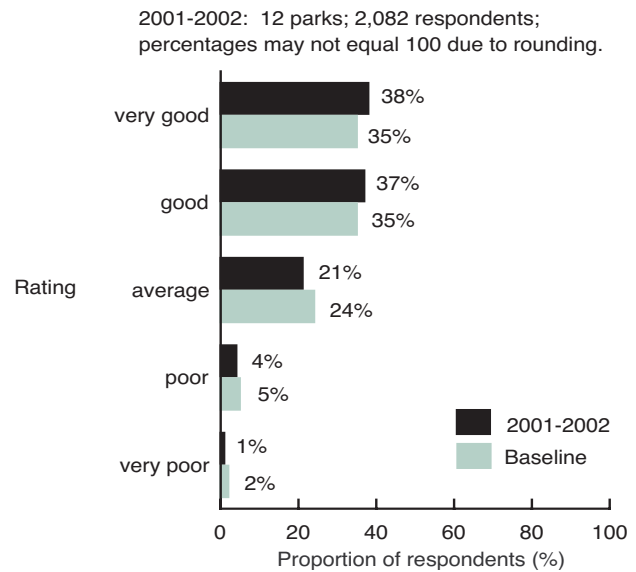


Figure 12: Quality of gift shops

A visitor's comment:

*more variety of restaurants.
Snack bars including sandwiches*



Catoctin Mountain Park, 1937

Overall Quality of Services

The services evaluated by the in-depth visitor studies are *indicators* of how well the NPS is serving the public. Figure 13 shows ratings of 12 visitor services, based on 28,331 respondents at 16 parks. These ratings are an index created by combining the ratings for the individual services. 49% of the current visitors rated the 12 services in the parks as “very good,” compared to the baseline rating of 47%. 32% rated the services as “good” and 15% rated the services as “average.” 4% of the visitors rated the services as “poor” or “very poor,” compared to the baseline rating of 6%.

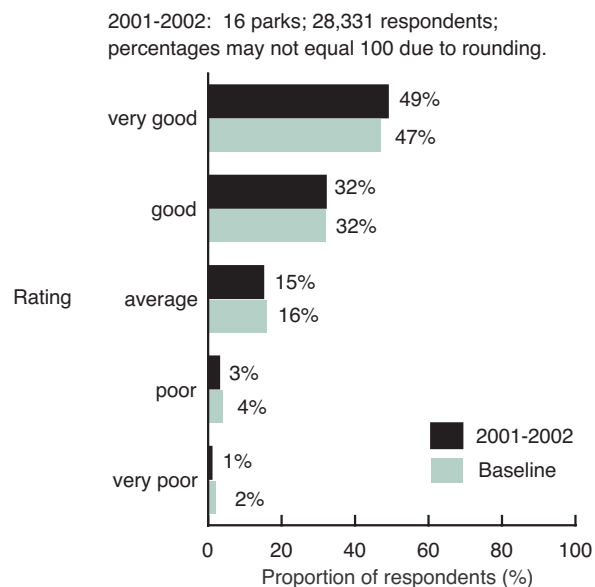


Figure 13: Overall quality of 12 services

A visitor's comment:

BALANCE BETWEEN MAINTAINING THE CURRENT
ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES (HIKING, CLIMBING, BIRD WATCHING,
CAVING, ETC) WITH MAINTAINING THE NATURAL
RESOURCES AND BEAUTY OF THE AREA DESPITE
THE NATURAL INCREASE OF VISITORS AND THEIR
IMPACT.



Virgin Islands National Park, 2000

VSP Customer Satisfaction Card

In 1993, Congress enacted the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). This law requires all federal agencies to set goals and report progress toward those goals. One of GPRA's purposes is to promote "...a new focus on results, service quality, and customer satisfaction" for the American people. The NPS is following the lead set forth by GPRA by setting agency goals to better manage its resources and services.

For the natural, cultural, and recreational resources in NPS care, and for the people served, GPRA requires the NPS to report how its goals are being met. One way to measure these goals is to survey visitors and ask them about the quality of their experiences while visiting NPS units (i.e., measure visitor satisfaction).

The NPS is moving forward to meet GPRA requirements by measuring visitor satisfaction. In early 1998, the NPS completed the development of a standardized customer satisfaction card. The card has been used annually (since 1998) by most NPS units to measure performance related to visitor satisfaction. In 2002, the customer satisfaction card was completed by a sample of visitors at 329 national park units. At year's end, a total of 28,612 visitors had completed and returned the customer satisfaction card.

On the following pages are graphs showing visitor evaluations of the quality of services within 3 important service categories—park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities. These ratings are an index created by combining the ratings for individual indicators within the service category. For this section, and for GPRA requirements, a visitor is "satisfied" when he or she rated a service as either "good" or "very good."



Cabrillo National Monument, 2001

Park Facilities

Visitor opinions of 5 key indicators are used to measure visitor satisfaction with park facilities. These indicators are:

- ▶ visitor centers,
- ▶ exhibits,
- ▶ restrooms,
- ▶ walkways, trails, and roads, and
- ▶ campgrounds and/or picnic areas.

84% of visitors were satisfied with these park facilities provided within the National Park System, compared to the baseline of 88%.

A visitor's comment:

*Best there was a wheelchair available
at no charge.*

2002: 304 parks; 32,217 respondents;
percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

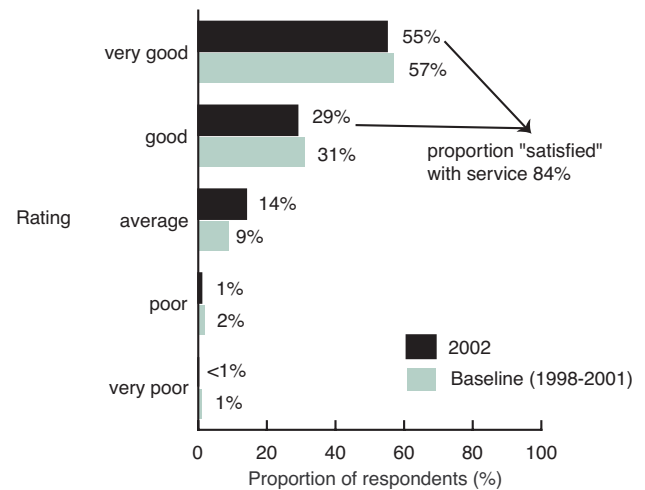


Figure 14: Combined index for satisfaction with park facilities



Cape Hatteras National Seashore, 2002

Visitor Services

Visitor opinions of 4 key indicators are used to measure satisfaction with visitor services provided in the parks. These indicators are:

- ▶ assistance from park employees,
- ▶ park maps or brochures,
- ▶ ranger programs, and
- ▶ commercial services in the park.

91% of visitors were satisfied with these services provided within the National Park System, compared to the baseline rating of 90%.

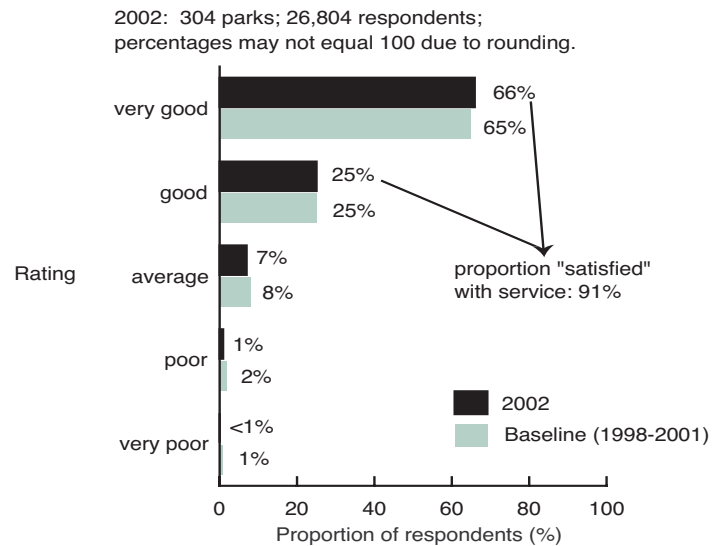


Figure 15: Combined index for satisfaction with visitor services

A visitor's comment:

VERY MUCH APPRECIATED THE HELPFUL,
INFORMATIVE, & CHEERFUL STAFF MEMBERS WE MET.



Cape Hatteras National Seashore, 2002

Recreational Opportunities

Visitor opinions of 3 important indicators are used to measure visitor satisfaction with recreational opportunities provided in the parks. These indicators are:

- ▶ learning about nature, history, or culture,
- ▶ outdoor recreation, and
- ▶ sightseeing.

93% of visitors were satisfied with these recreational opportunities provided within the National Park System, compared to the baseline rating of 92%.

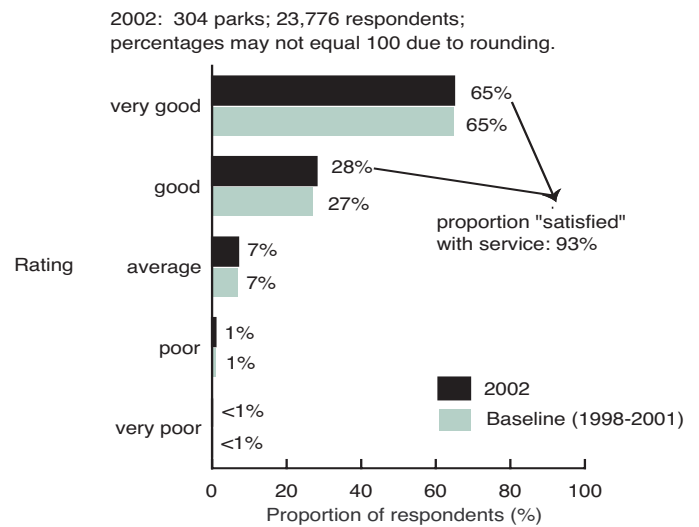


Figure 16: Combined index for satisfaction with recreational opportunities

A visitor's comment:

Thank you! It was wonderful - great hiking & you can tell the employees really care!



Cape Hatteras National Seashore, 2002

Overall Quality of Facilities, Services, and Recreational Opportunities

NPS units are required to annually report performance related to a broad list of GPRA goals. Visitor satisfaction is one of these goals. The NPS 1999 GPRA goal IIa1 (visitor satisfaction) states that “95% of park visitors are satisfied with appropriate park facilities, services, and recreational opportunities.”

For GPRA reporting purposes, the customer satisfaction card includes an overall quality question used as the primary measure of visitor satisfaction. This question asked visitors to rate the “overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities.” Visitor responses to this question are used to calculate each park’s visitor satisfaction rating. Again, a visitor is considered “satisfied” if their response to this overall quality question was either “very good” or “good.”

Figure 17 shows the overall quality rating based on 26,990 respondents in 304 units in the National Park System. In 2002, this satisfaction level (95%) was greater than the 94% baseline rating.

The customer satisfaction card results show strong evidence of excellent visitor service across the National Park System. The NPS has demanding GPRA goals for visitor satisfaction. Of the 304 parks which successfully completed a 2002 visitor satisfaction survey, 192 parks (63%) met the annual servicewide goal of 95% visitor satisfaction. 259 parks (85%) of the 304 parks had a visitor satisfaction rating of 90% or greater.

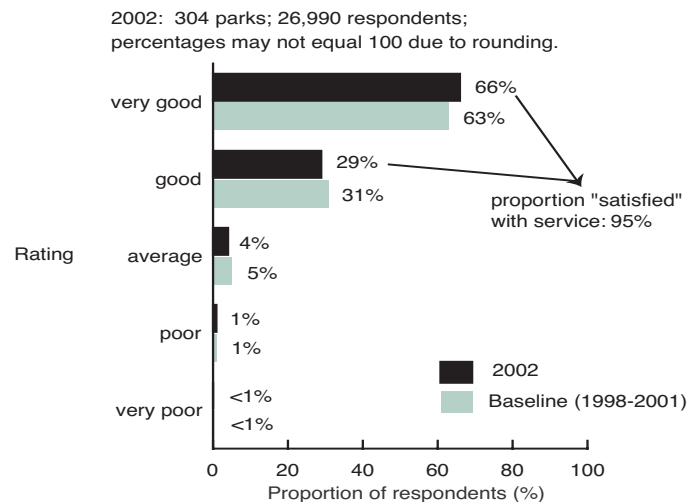


Figure 17: Overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities

A visitor's comment:

*What an overall pleasant experience
I will surely be back!*

The results from the customer satisfaction card surveys at individual parks were combined to produce a satisfaction rating for each individual NPS region. Figure 18 shows the 7 regions and the percentage of park visitors satisfied overall with appropriate facilities, services, and recreational opportunities. Regional overall visitor satisfaction scores are very similar, ranging from 93% to 96%.

The customer satisfaction card results can provide parks with benefits beyond simply meeting annual GPRA reporting requirements. These results can be useful in planning, operations, management, and research related to the national parks. The results allow park managers to better understand visitor needs, protect natural and cultural resources, and improve visitor services.

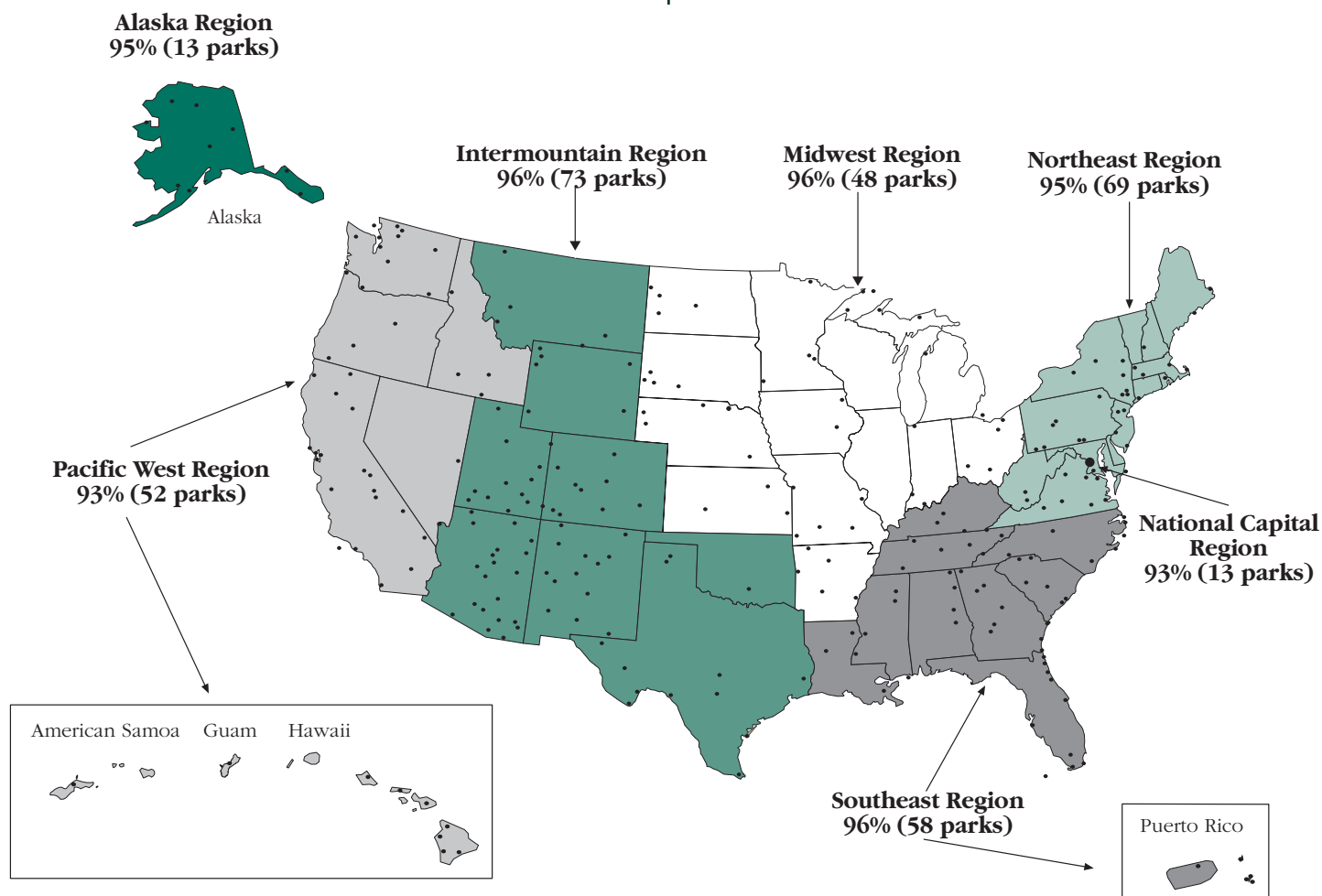


Figure 18: Percentage of visitors satisfied overall, by NPS region, 2002

Conclusion

Both the in-depth visitor studies and the customer satisfaction card asked visitors to rate the overall quality of the services provided during their visit.

The study results included in this report show that visitors are largely satisfied with the quality of services they are receiving in the National Park System.

By monitoring visitor satisfaction through different types of visitor studies, and using the information to improve all aspects of park operations, the NPS can continue to protect resources and provide high quality visitor service.



USS Arizona Memorial, 2000

A visitor's comment:

INTERESTING & EDUCATIONAL AS WELL
AS SCENIC TO THOSE VISITING
FROM FAR AWAY AREAS.

Research Methods

VSP Visitor Studies

The in-depth visitor studies conducted by the VSP are based on systematic surveys of park visitors. A random sample of visitor groups is chosen to represent the general visitor population during a 1-week study period. The sample is usually “stratified,” or distributed by entrance or zone, depending upon park characteristics. Sample size and sampling intervals are based upon estimates using the previous year’s visitation statistics. Results are usually accurate to within 4 percentage points for simple questions, and are somewhat less accurate for more complex ones. The results are statistically significant at the .05 level. This means that if different samples had been drawn, the results would have been similar 95 out of 100 times.

VSP personnel hold an on-site workshop with park staff to develop the survey questionnaire and plan the study. Standard demographic questions are included in each survey, and park managers can include additional “customized” questions to reflect their information needs. In addition, questionnaires include open-ended questions in which visitors are asked to provide comments about their visit.

Short (2-minute) interviews are conducted as visitors arrive at a sampling site. The interviews are to collect data for a non-response bias check, obtain mailing addresses for follow-up reminders, and distribute the mail-back questionnaires. The refusal rate (the proportion of visitors contacted that decline to participate) currently averages 7%. The response rate (the proportion of visitors that return their questionnaires) currently averages 78%. The data are

coded and entered on a computer by the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center at Washington State University. The data are analyzed using a standard statistical analysis program. A respondent, for the purposes of this report, is a member of a visitor group that provided a response to a particular questionnaire item. A check on key variables is conducted to see if those visitors who did not respond (from initial interview data) were significantly different from those who returned their questionnaires (non-response bias). Responses to open-ended questions (in which visitors write comments) are categorized and summarized by VSP staff.

In-depth visitor studies have several limitations. Responses to mail-back questionnaires may not reflect actual behavior or opinions. The results cannot always be generalized beyond the study periods. Visitor groups that do not include an English-speaking person may be under-represented. These limitations apply to all studies of this type.

VSP Customer Satisfaction Card Surveys

The customer satisfaction card surveys have a somewhat different methodology than the in-depth visitor studies. For each survey, park staff select an interval sampling plan based on the previous years' visitation. 400 customer satisfaction cards are distributed to a random sample of visitors in each park during a 30-day study period. Results are usually accurate to within 6 percentage points. For individual park reports, results are statistically significant at the .05 level. This means that if different samples had been drawn, the results would have been similar 95 out of 100 times. For the National Park System as a whole, results are accurate to within 1 percentage point. These results are statistically significant at the .01 level.

Park staff are trained to distribute cards according to a standard set of survey instructions and guidelines. A standardized customer satisfaction card which includes the same set of service-related questions is used for each survey. In addition, the card includes an open-ended question to evaluate visitor understanding.

Returned cards were electronically scanned, and the data coded and prepared by Visual Input Systems Analysts, Incorporated, located in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The response rate (the proportion of visitors that return their survey card) for the 304 customer satisfaction card surveys averaged 26%. A test for non-response bias was conducted by comparing the results for the same question from both the customer satisfaction card and the in-depth visitor studies. The data were gathered in the same

parks, seasons, and survey locations. The results of this test suggest that non-response bias was not significant.

For individual park reports, frequency distributions are calculated for each indicator and category. At the end of the calendar year, responses from individual park surveys are combined to create reports at the cluster, region, and systemwide levels. Data from parks with less than 30 returned cards, or from parks with discrepancies in data collection methods, are omitted from these reports and *Serving the Visitor*.

The customer satisfaction card surveys have several limitations. The data reflect visitor opinions about the NPS unit's facilities, services, and recreational opportunities during the survey period. The results do not necessarily apply to visitors during other times of the year, or park visitors who did not visit one of the survey locations. Visitor groups that do not include an English-speaking person may be under-represented. These limitations apply to all studies of this type.



Cabrillo National Monument, 2001

VSP Visitor Studies


The data for in-depth visitor studies in this report came from the following NPS units:

Acadia National Park, Maine
Badlands National Park, South Dakota
Big Cypress National Preserve, Florida
Biscayne National Park, Florida
Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah
Chamizal National Memorial, Texas
Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, Georgia
Chiricahua National Monument, Arizona
Colonial National Historical Park-Jamestown Island, Virginia
Crater Lake National Park, Oregon
Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, Tennessee
Cumberland Island National Seashore, Georgia
Death Valley National Park, California
Dry Tortugas National Park, Florida
Eisenhower National Historic Site, Pennsylvania
Everglades National Park, Florida
Fort Bowie National Historic Site, Arizona
Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve, Alaska
Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming
Great Falls Park, Virginia
Great Sand Dunes National Monument & Preserve, Colorado
Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee/North Carolina
Haleakala National Park, Hawaii
Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, Pennsylvania
Iwo Jima/Netherlands Carillon Memorials, Washington, D.C.
Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve, Louisiana
Kenai Fjords National Park, Alaska
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, Alaska
Lassen Volcanic National Park, California
Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, Indiana
Lowell National Historical Park, Massachusetts
Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site, Georgia
Mojave National Preserve, California
National Monuments & Memorials (National Mall), Washington, D.C.
New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, Massachusetts
Olympic National Park, Washington
Outer Banks Group (Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Wright Brothers National Memorial, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site), North Carolina
Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Michigan

Pinnacles National Monument, Pennsylvania
Pipestone National Monument, Minnesota
Prince William Forest Park, Virginia
Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C.
San Juan National Historic Site, Puerto Rico
St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, Wisconsin/Minnesota
Sequoia & King Canyon National Parks and Sequoia National Forest, California
Shenandoah National Park, Virginia
Stones River National Battlefield, Tennessee
USS *Arizona* Memorial, Hawaii
Virgin Islands National Park, U.S. Virgin Islands
Voyageurs National Park, Minnesota
Whiskeytown National Recreation Area, California
White House Tours and White House Visitor Center, Washington, D.C.


VSP Customer Satisfaction Card Surveys

The data for customer satisfaction card surveys in this report came from 304 NPS units.



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